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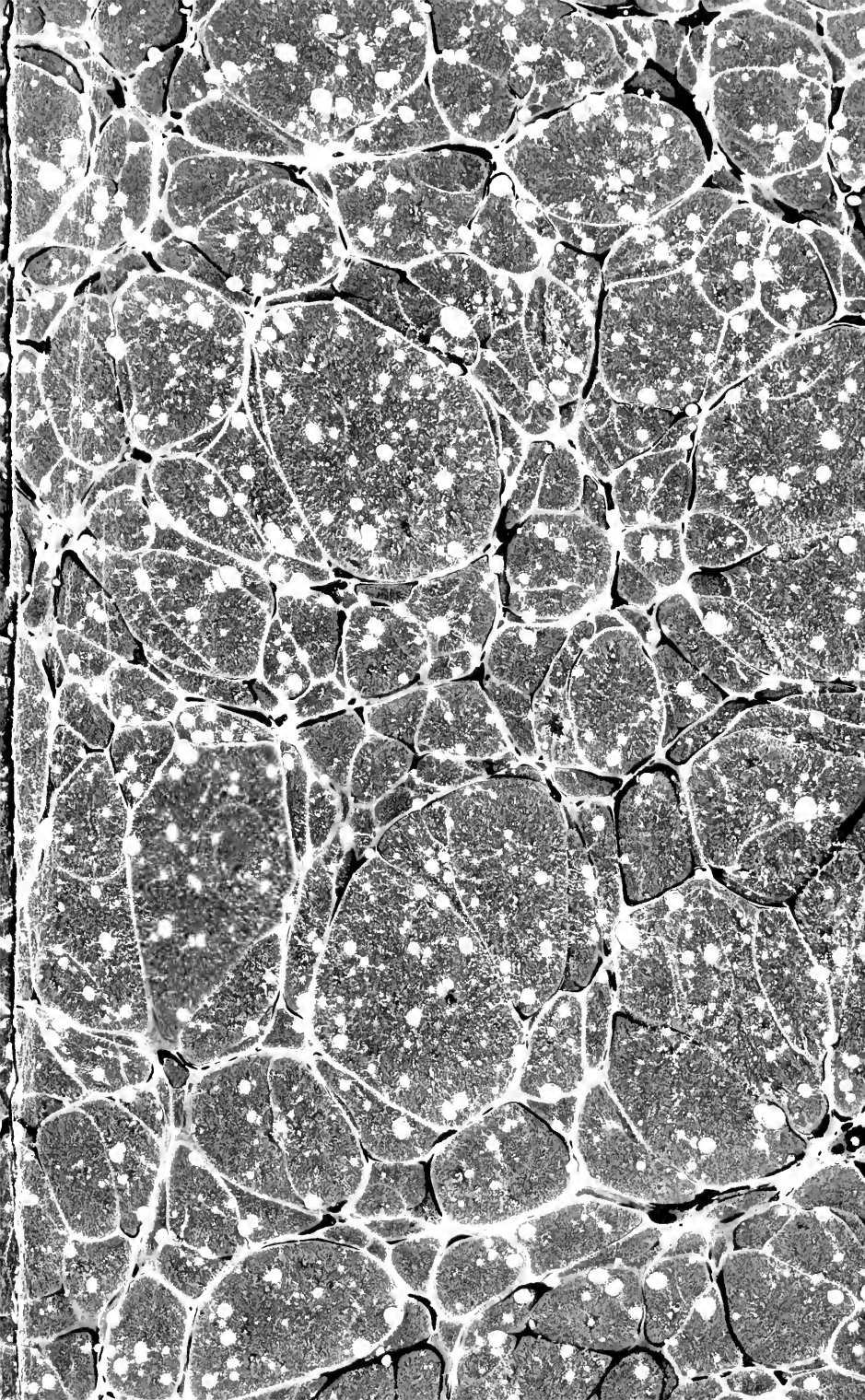
Recollections of my own Times, by  
Chief Justice, George Shea,  
Of the Marine Court,  
Of the City of New York  
1832 to 1894.



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## PREFACE

I BEGAN at my rural retreat in Brattleboro, Vermont, now eleven years ago (August 1, 1883), to indite these Recollections. Since that time anxious business and other cares have required all the attention my ability could exert. At last a season of comparative retirement from the actual strifes of business comes to me, offering cause to hope that it puts it in my power to complete what I then undertook. There are many projects and events of which I alone am now able adequately to relate. It will disclose motives, objects, and careers of abiding interest; and — as it has been said by those who chiefly have persuaded me to the task — will make more clear deeds upon which must rest the fame of men whose names are already esteemed of permanent historic value. They all are passed through this to the higher and eternal life.<sup>1</sup> I shall have occasions to speak of matters of lighter, but

<sup>1</sup> Among whom ought to be especially mentioned Horace Greeley; Samuel Seabury, D. D., Vice-President Henry Wilson; Lord Houghton; William Connor Magee, D. D., late Lord Archbishop of York (his father and mine were Corkagians, and knew each other), Charles O'Connor, General Quincy Adams Gillmore, Bayard Taylor, and the late Robert Shelton Mackenzie. Greeley, Seabury, Gillmore, O'Connor, and Wilson were very urgent that serious affairs with which they were connected should be accurately recorded by me, being most familiar with their history. I shall have much to relate of these eminent men themselves.

still not trivial significance, wholly within my own knowledge, the relation of which has often entertained my own immediate associates, and which may have an interest for a number of people of these and of future days ; and thus, perhaps, I may aid to preserve, in colors less fading than those of memory, incidents, anecdotes, and traditions of distinguished personages who knew me, whom I knew, and with whom I was often closely consociated in pleasant intercourse as well as in affairs of pith and moment.

These Recollections will comprehend a space of time of more than half a century, Long years ! but brief in retrospect.

BELLAGIO, LAKE OF COMO, ITALY,  
September 20, 1894.

M. A. Shea

# MY RECOLLECTIONS OF MY OWN TIMES

## 1832-1894

### I

I BEGAN on April 00, 1837, active and as they proved efficient efforts to support and maintain myself by my own individual labors. I was then ten years of age.

On the fourth day of the previous month, while on a visit to the city of Washington with Mrs. Katherine Stevenson, my maternal aunt, I was present at the inauguration ceremonies of President Van Buren; and I was there not so much by curiosity to behold the occasion, or to see the incoming of the new President, as to look upon Andrew Jackson taking leave finally of public life. He had often come to the Lancastrian school,<sup>1</sup> and was ever

<sup>1</sup> I believe that the plan of instruction instituted by Joseph Lancaster is not used in this our time. Its main features were employing the older or more efficient scholars as monitors, and a system of elaborate drill, by which those as teachers were able to instruct in the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic a large number of the other scholars at once. The materials used were very scanty; and, instead of pen and ink, or slate and pencil, a board was spread with sand for each child, in which he characterized the letters with his fingers. The little community was so organized

that the members learned much from each other by feeling the need of common efforts to accomplish common purposes. The movements of the children were regulated by military precision, and in our school we had a company which drilled in a uniform of green bombazine jackets, nankeen trousers, cap trimmed with gilt lace, and long spears with heavy tin heads. This body had a particular charm for the President, and proud we were as we sometimes filed in marching order before the Hero of New Orleans.

friendly and talkative to the boys. I attended that school, and was "the monitor" of my class. The school-house was situate on the middle of the Common, which is between the Capitol Hill and the Navy Yard. As I recollect him, he, notwithstanding the rigorous aspect which some of his portraits represent,<sup>1</sup> appeared to us a kind-hearted man, of simple and earnest manners; and we boys looked upon him as a welcome friend, and never thought of him as the hero soldier, or as the dictatorial President of whom we heard harsh accusations; which probably none of us heard as abundantly as I did, for I was in the midst of the old Federal and the Whig coteries. Yet it was true that Jackson was a most positive man in his opinions and acts, and, while straightforward and open, too frequently indulged in passionate outbursts. My associates were among the sons of our Federal-Whigs,<sup>2</sup> because my paternal grandfather was, and had been since his arrival in America (1812-1813,) of "the old Federalist school" of politics, and was a firm devotee to a protection of American industry, almost prohibitory of articles of foreign fabrication, especially those of Great Britain. He voted in the presidential election of 1832, as he had in that of 1828, for Henry Clay for President; and his only son, my father, a Whig and an ardent adherent of that great leader, voted for Clay, in 1844.

<sup>1</sup> The finest portrait, as a work of art, of Jackson — and probably the best presentment of him in his prime — is that by Jarvis, the eminent American painter. It represents him in the uniform of a major-general. Another represents him in his latter time, and throughout just as I have seen him. It is a profile. These portraits are in the Manhattan Club, New York, and the last named was donated by Charles O'Connor.

<sup>2</sup> The Whigs were not formally organized a party till the spring of 1834, and then by an union of those who condemned the policy and acts of the administration. — especially the removal of deposits of public treasure by General Jackson, — most of whom were previously known as supporters of Adams and Clay, and advocates of "the American System."



There were pleasant relations of acquaintanceship between Mr. Clay and my father, which began in 1836–1837, while he was a writer and reporter on the “*Intelligencer*” (the national organ of the Whig party), published by Gales & Seaton at Washington. My father and his family, then recently arrived from West Point, were living in Philadelphia during the autumn of 1832: the Clay and Jackson election contest was at its fever height. We, in these our latter and comparatively placid times, can have no notion of the partisan envy, hatred, and malice of those times, running into all relations of social, business, and even religious life. We, children at school, were, to the verge of our physical ability, contentious and quarrelsome with one another on the subject, — probably not less senselessly than our fathers, — and more than once was I beaten and bruised by fellow-scholars for my advocacy of Clay. Our respective parties gathered each day after school-hours about the “*Liberty Pole*” (Clay) and the “*Hickory Pole*” (Jacksonian),<sup>1</sup> and those were the centrifugal spots from which we sallied forth for the strifes. I was thus from almost childhood within the arena of party contentions, and was especially in the atmospheres of the Federalist doctrines; wherefore it came about in latter years (1835–1837) I was near to the centres where were engendered those enmities and opinions of parties which, though of remote origin,<sup>2</sup> were now more belligerent than before, and were developing an immense popular uprising against the Van Buren-Jackson “*dynasty*,” which had for years seemed invin-

<sup>1</sup> The Claypole was our familiar tall flagstaff, with the liberty cap at its head; the Jackson, a tall hickory-tree, with its branches trimmed close to the top.

<sup>2</sup> “Jefferson and Madison were brought forward by caucus nomina-

tions. . . . The first year (1821) of Mr. Monroe’s second term had scarcely passed away before the political atmosphere became inflamed to an unprecedented extent.’ — *Van Buren’s Political Parties*.

eible. And just as Jackson was leaving office, the great crises of 1836–1837 were already imminent. Van Buren succeeded to assume the burthen of the ensuing business calamities — and great they were.<sup>1</sup> Jackson retired with a degree of personal popularity greater than ever : greater than at any time during his presidential term, and his political day closed with the radiance of a glorious autumn. Van Buren from the outset had to enter into an arena from which the sunlight had gone, and about which clouds and ominous conjectures were gathering. The industrial, commercial, and financial resources and energies of the country were checked, and before the spring of 1837 came they were throughout the land, to all seeming, hopelessly cast down.

My first view of the city of Washington was at the dawn of day on Christmas, 1835. We left Baltimore the previous night in the regular mail-coach, and greatly did I rejoice in our four horses as we dashed along. I was in the ecstasies of a novel excitement, and if I slept, it must have been towards morning. I have in memory, with the distinctness of a boy's vivacious mental vision, the incidents of the route. On coming near to Bladensburgh a snowstorm was setting in, and our coach, reaching Washington, toiled into the centre of the city through a heavy fall of snow. I heard at the time, and have always understood, that that was the last mail-coach driven between those cities — for the next day the railway line was opened to Bladensburgh, and from there for a short time the coaches for-

<sup>1</sup> As I had beheld Van Buren in his incoming, so I chanced to behold him in retiring, on his way to Kinderhook. He was received at New York in an impressive manner and conducted in an open carriage through the chief streets by a multitudinous procession. I saw the

pageant from an upper window as it passed along Chatham Street. The respectful and public receptions of our distinguished men were with one accord and were notable events in those days. Now — none so poor to do them reverence.

warded the passengers and mails into Washington, till the railway was completed to the Capitol. My fancy was eager that night — perhaps nothing passed me unnoticed : the stopping of the coach at the roadside taverns, to change horses ; dropping and taking in passengers ; the calls and shouting of the stable-men, and the glancing of the lights of lanterns as the horses, harnesses, and coach were examined ; the smith's forge casting forth flames ; the face of the blacksmith radiant in their rays ; the sparks flying in sparkling showers around the anvil as the iron was beaten ; and the horses standing in the shop ready to be shod. A warm repast of food, and we were soon all aboard again ; and the new-comers opened new themes for conversation. The horses “ were given their heads,” we were once more on the road ; the notes of the guard's bugle startled the silence of the dark and chill night as we went onwards. Many were the stops we made near farmhouses to leave out or take in passengers ; and each such change evoked a renewal of lively conversations with the latest comers. Political subjects, often very heated, superseded all others. Our first stop after leaving Baltimore was at the Relay House, at the bridge near the river. There were also outside-passengers, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather ; there the smokers perched themselves, and, buried in their heavy furs, looked to my imagination as a coterie of convivial bears. Some of those scenes, though I saw them then in reality for the first time, had a familiar aspect. I have since thought that I must have seen engravings of Wouverman's roadside hostelries, with the taverns, forges, and horses of his storied landscapes : those would have had sufficient suggestiveness for my young fancy. As we came by Bladensburgh we heard of riots there among the railway operatives, and great was the fear of some of our people. But we saw nothing of riot or rioters. I note

the incident, for it was there I first heard the phrase, "Corkonians and Fardowners," — a phrase since grown into wide repute with us.

In Washington our home was a little way outside the city proper, on the road to Georgetown, near the Bridge. The houses in that neighborhood stood in large gardens and orchards, or were farms. Yet there were good families enough there and near by to make a community of choice people. John Quincy Adams lived near by, and well I recollect his grounds abundantly covered with apricots and freestone peaches, in which I as well as other lads took a free and stealthy delight. But our own chief intimacies were with the Hon. John L. O'Sullivan, and Samuel Langtree,<sup>1</sup> and their families, and our evenings were often spent together. Mr. Adams and my father, being near neighbors and of the same political party, and each of a literary turn, were on more than mere speaking acquaintanceship. I remember some of the notables of that time in Washington: there was the Reverend Dr. Ryder, the famous president of Georgetown College, who was a frequent caller at our house. He was a very intimate associate of Mr. Clay, and one of the greatest pulpit orators, conversationalists, and controversialists of the age. There was Lewis Cass, sitting in front of his residence, his custom of a summer afternoon, always ready for a talk. I liked to wander in that direction, and have the "General" notice and call me to him. Then there were the two daughters of General Van Ness, beauties and *grande demoiselles*, one of whom became Lady Gore Onsley, wife of the British ambassador; the other the wife of the Hon. James I. Roosevelt, a

<sup>1</sup> They were the editors and proprietors of the *Georgetown Metropolitan*. Mr. O'Sullivan was afterwards our chargé to Portugal, and at the time of his death (1893) the

oldest editor in the United States. In late years he and I were close friends and associates in literary and social circles.

judge of the New York Supreme Court. The former I never saw after leaving Washington, but Mrs. Roosevelt honored me with hospitable attentions, and I have been at her receptions in her mansion on Broadway, in New York. Others equally attractive, of Washington society, I knew, but in later days; and of whom I may speak.

While we were living at this place, near the Georgetown bridge, a man named Whelan attended to the garden. He was a native of Ireland; came from near Carrickfergus;<sup>1</sup> and was a violent Jacksonian Democrat — limited, and for some cause, and probably no reason, roused, and not seldom, by a hatred of Van Buren, then the Vice-President. Maybe because he regarded him a sort of Dauphin, waiting for Jackson's place. But it is of his brother "Larry" that I have to speak. He was a frequent Sunday visitor to his brother, our gardener. This Larry was a stone-cutter, working at this time, and I believe for many years after, on what was known as "the New Treasury Building." He bore a most remarkable and notable resemblance to Jackson, and both the brothers prided themselves greatly on it. The President frequently passing where Larry was at work, seldom neglected, it was said, the opportunity to give him a kindly recognition. Malicious and jocose tongues would suggest that there was possibly a consanguineous relationship between them; but the malice lost its venom and the joke its point, for the two were nearly of an age. Now, on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue, just opposite this Treasury Building, then in course of erection, was a small public-house where nothing but Monongahela whiskey was sold. At noon for an hour the me-

<sup>1</sup> The parents of Jackson were a remarkable town, and one of the natives of Carrickfergus, a town in famous antiquities of Europe. the north of Ireland, near Belfast,

chanies and laborers assembled there; bringing their dinners with them, and having a glass of the liquor. The whiskey was drawn direct from the keg into large pitchers, and thus the customers were served. They were good-tempered, and I cannot recollect any case of intoxication among them. I was tempted to the place, and was often there during that hour on Saturdays, when there was no school, to hear them tell stories and sing songs. There I first heard "The Shan Van Voch," "The Wearing of the Green," the "Rollicking, Roaring Irishman,"<sup>1</sup> and "The Cruiskeen Lawn," and though in later years I have heard those songs sung by the famous Tyrone Power, by Samuel Lover himself, and by Mossop and Collins, I think that I have never heard them given with more genuine humor and true meaning than when voiced by the stone-cutters and laborers of the Treasury. There were sweet tenor voices among them; and Moore's melodies were familiar favorites. These jovial associates carried Larry into a bit of disrespectful fun, which, in the autumn of 1836, nearly brought to a close the distinguishing courtesy by which the President noticed him. He yielded to the mischief-making desire of the others, prompted, as was afterwards suspected, by the brilliant and ill-fated George Drumgoole, the member from Virginia. The costume usually worn out of doors by the President was somewhat peculiar and well known. Larry was accounted to be a counterfeit presentment. A white beaver hat, heavily in bands of mourning; spectacles, weighty in gold rims, on his nose; long-skirted overcoat reaching to the ankles; and a thick black cane with large ivory knob, completed a deceptive attire. And forth

<sup>1</sup> Charles O'Connor, the distinguished advocate,—who honored me for thirty years with friendship and intimacy,—was very fond of

some of these songs; of whom I shall anon have much to say.

<sup>2</sup> He fought a duel; killed his opponent; and for some years survived his usefulness and happiness.

down Pennsylvania Avenue went the verisimilitude of the presidential personage, tall, erect, and with martial gait. He was offered salutes here and there in abundance as he strode on; and he knew how to acknowledge them in appropriate form. Some intimates outside the immediate conspirators had been let into a preknowledge of what was to be done, and those enjoyed it, but from a prudent distance. Greatly was the gleeful expectation arising to meet Larry on the return up the avenue; when, within a couple of streets of the Capitol grounds, near the temporary railway shed, the President himself, just in from a visit out of town, turned into the avenue, and the "two Dromios" came face to face. It is not necessary to describe further than to say that the pleasing hope of lookers-on was not to be gratified for a scene in which Larry would be publicly caned—an expectation not unreasonable from Jackson's reputation for prompt discipline. The President quietly approached Larry, and what was said by him was heard by none but themselves. Larry's hurried and furtive efforts to rid himself of his uneasy garments caused the only merriment. The President without delay had a hack called, and Larry, placing himself in it, humiliated and sad, for the first and probably the last time in his life went home in his own carriage.

General Jackson was partial to at least one more native of his fatherland. This was Martin Ranahan, famous among the local celebrities of the time. He was what is called "a character;" and he and Larry were indeed *privileged* characters. Martin was the chief hall-porter at the White House, and had been, I think, in that office from the beginning of President Jackson's first term. He was nursing an ancient, ardent, and vindictive hostility towards all "Whigs and Whiggery;" and this passion he actually sought occasions to declare and inflict. The occasions which came oftenest were when visitors,

even the Whig senators, called ; and many a time and oft were his incivility and annoyances complained of to the President personally. These instances of disrespect grew more and more numerous, and at length Martin was brought to face the multitude of accusations. The President sent for him to come to his private chambers, where his Excellency earnestly upbraided the unappeasable Martin. "Yer Excellence," suggested the culprit, "those are only what *our* enemies, the dastardly Whigs, say ; and if I don't mean to be *too civil* it is just to their likes." The President told him that callers, whether Whigs or any others, on public business had the right to be respectfully received and presented ; and added, "Martin, your conduct has become intolerable. We must part." Martin assumed the attitude of patient sufferance, and said : "Well ! well ! yer Excellence, if it is your wish I suppose it has to be ; but, sir, *a word in season*. I go along the avenue, and into the halls of the hotels, and I hear those same senators and the likes, talk about yer Excellence, too ; and I tell ye that if I believed only a little of all *they* say of *you*, I would n't stay in this White House another day." The President succeeded in subduing his mirth long enough to have Martin depart the chambers, and to say to him : "I suppose it is so, Ranahan,—perhaps you are as well abused as myself." His "Excellence" would relate this incident with great gusto to the accusing senators and others ; and whether Ranahan amended his manners, or the callers began to tolerate him, it is certain that he became a more famous "Martin," and very popular ; so much so that he remained *the* hall-porter to the end of the Jackson administration ; was retained by President Van Buren, and by President Harrison. When General Harrison, as the successor of Van Buren, came to the hall of entrance under the portico of the White House, March, 1841,



Martin, who was well known to him, was there to do the duties of his office. "Welcome, yer Excellency, to yer own hooouse. All is ready for you; I am now the only *martin* in the nest." "Remain here, Martin, and help to keep it warm for me." And remain he did, growing in favor and fame, till John Tyler, the Vice President, succeeding to the presidency on the death of Harrison, April 4, 1841, *superseded* the old porter by appointing one of the rising mob of political applicants.<sup>1</sup> They were now a body of mingling, persistent gangs, for an invasion of Tylerite democracy was pushing aside or coöperating with the former host which Horace Greeley had spoken of as "coon minstrels and cider-suckers."

As I have said, I was at the inauguration of President Van Buren (March 4, 1837). That morning the outgoing and the incoming President rode together in an open carriage, made, it was currently rumored, from timber of the frigate *Constitution*. I watched from the western terrace of the Capitol the procession as it moved from the White House down the avenue, and wild and loud were the salutations of the masses of the people along the route. My father was connected with the press; and, as he had till lately reported for the newspaper with which he was connected (the "Washington Intelligencer,") I had often gone upon the floor of the Senate to see him, and often to get from him "the copy" to bring to the editorial room; and so, at the time of the inauguration I was known to members of the Senate, and, better for my purpose, to most of the clerks and attendants of that chamber; wherefore I easily passed on in the

<sup>1</sup> The date, however, at which the organization of the uses of political patronage for party purposes, corrupting the civic service, was introduced into national offices was

under Van Buren, and, indeed, while he was Vice President. The Jackson administration had two coteries in it from its earliest start: one was Van Buren's, the other Calhoun's.

gathering of distinguished officials and other personages, usual on such events, to the temporary platform erected over the steps of the eastern portico ; and there, standing near the chair where Jackson, now a private citizen sat, I heard, but probably did not heed, President Van Buren pronounce the inaugural address.

That day began to body forth a memorable era for our country. In its conceptions were already the stimulants to those contentions which found no end till the war for the Union of the Republic determined an enduring nationality. The device called the caucus — said to be peculiar to us — had then its permanent establishment in political uses, and its baneful influences were already usurping the healthful operation of free and intelligent party adherency. The winter of 1836-1837 saw business generally beginning to fall into the distress which was one of the severest which we ever have suffered. Banks were becoming weak, and the weaker began to break. There was a small bank on the avenue, near to Fourteenth Street, close to where Willard's Hotel has since stood. One morning its doors remained closed. A crowd of its depositors, among whom were negroes, gathered about it, and increased soon to a great number. They tried to force the entrance open. Well do I recollect the frantic actions of what was at last a mob. The president of the bank nor any of its officers could be found ; but the president's body was found the next morning. He was in dread of being "lynched," and had drowned himself in the canal. The indefinite and foreboding horror by which this scene and circumstance affected my mind and imagination has never been effaced nor diminished. I then first heard of a bank breaking, of lynching, of suicide ; and first saw a tumultuous crowd of thoughtless people made savage by anger and a desire for revenge. I have in later years heard of and seen many such out-

breaks and crimes, and more portentous ;<sup>1</sup> but this first impression remains unmixed with others, and ever excites in me a fresh feeling of repulsion.

The month after the inauguration the common crash came ; and the financial, industrial, and commercial centres of the business of the country had to yield wholly to the forces of adversity. At this time (1893-1894) in the presence of the depressed state of business, especially of our industrial fabrication, and of the wide and deep financial derangement, it is meet to recall to our thought the causes and the occasions of former like events. Those of 1836-1837 were — it must be admitted — quite peculiar ; but their warning example is nevertheless of pregnant value. Their history is this : that from the claims paid to us by a number of European nations on account of spoliations committed by them under the Continental system of Napoleon, there remained belonging to the government of the United States itself a balance of about \$35,000,000 ; and this sum the government had

<sup>1</sup> I was a beholder of the Astor Place riot, in which the partisans of Edwin Forrest and those of William Macready, the rival actors, thought it feasible to fix the merits and pre-eminence of one or the other. I saw horrible phases, also, of the Draft Riots in 1863. The latter were most pregnant in immediate danger at that very time to the national cause ; more than even the armed hosts of the Confederation converging upon the borders of our neighboring State of Pennsylvania. I must relate one incident. There lived in West 29th Street, between 8th and 9th avenues, an old and respected citizen known as "Pop." He was an innocent and hearty devotee of the Democratic party,

and bore a dangerous though only general likeness to Horace Greeley. Venturing out to see how matters were, he was set upon by ruffians ; and struck by some heavy instrument, his skull was fractured. The celebrated surgeon, Lewis A. Sayre, — from himself I have the story, — was instantly called in, and lifting the portions of the skull which pressed upon the brain, the poor man regained his mind. Sayre's indignation was violent at the brutal and reckless act. But the old man did not join him in this view. "Oh, doctor," said he, "the boys meant it all right. They took me for Horace Greeley"! and he was wholly sincere and reconciled.

placed in eighty banks on deposit. The banks in time were regarding and using it in their trade of loans on credit; and regarding further the sum in the nature of permanent loans to themselves by the government. The Bank of the United States had been abolished. So, at last a time came for withdrawing suddenly these deposits. Jackson was and had been urgent to create a currency to be composed mainly of specie; and it was to that end that he had required the payments from those foreign nations to be paid in specie, and to be transmitted, as far as convenient, in specie to this country. Congress now directed the \$35,000,000 to be distributed among the States, and it was to make this distribution that the government called in those deposits from the banks, and so as to meet with specie the drafts in favor of the States. This unexpected call, together with the breaks in the overstrained credits between us and Europe, and the ruinous decline in the cotton-market, were of the causes and occasions which precipitated the calamity upon us.

In the early winter of 1836-1837, my father had returned to Baltimore. He had to accept work wherever he could find employment; but he was induced to go there, I think, by his old West Point friend, Edgar Allan Poe. A new weekly was starting or reviving, called the "Monument," and he was required to assist as literary editor. This was one of Poe's seasons of utter poverty,<sup>1</sup> much owing to the hard times, but more to his own failings. The paper was of course unsuccessful; it lacked money support and proper business management. After remaining in that city till the spring of 1838, my father went to Philadelphia, and there engaged in the literary department of the "Saturday Courier,"

<sup>1</sup> Poe is one whom I reserve to speak of at length in a further part of these Recollections.

with his friend Joseph R. Chandler, and sometimes wrote for Godey's "Lady's Book" and the "Southern Literary Messenger." Our stay in Philadelphia had incidents for me which are worth mentioning; but our removal to Baltimore produced a positive directing influence upon my own course of life. My aunt and I returned home soon after the inauguration. Attendance at daily school had become a weary toil: I learned more and better from my father's brief *examinations* of an evening than from the day's plodding in the close schoolroom; and the restlessness begotten by the excitements of Washington indisposed me for further attendance on mere routine studies. Besides, I began to perceive that it might be convenient, probably would be necessary, for me to do something towards my own support. My first impulse was to go back to Washington and procure the place of a page in either house of Congress. I was, as I have mentioned, known to some of the Senators, and was likewise to Representatives; so the impulse was not wholly vain nor unpromising. But, late of an afternoon, as I was in a day-dream, loitering along St. Paul Street, coming to the corner of the lane leading down to the Court House, I saw seated on the "stoop," in front of his office, William Gwinn, the editor and proprietor of the "Baltimore Gazette." He was friendly to our family, and knew me. He spoke to me; and as we talked, it suddenly occurred to me that I should like to be a compositor, — the name by which type-setters are called. He seemed amused at the earnestness with which I made the request, and said I was too young to think of anything but school. Young as I was in years, I was younger in appearance: for my years I was truly small in size and seemed very delicate in health. I reminded him of the hard times, and that it might soon be needed that I find means for my own maintenance. I also told him that I

could no longer abide the imprisonment of the school-room, and how little good it was doing me. He was an indulgent, amiable gentleman; and perhaps only to please what might have been a boy's fleeting fancy, told me to come to him the following Monday morning.<sup>1</sup> I was early that morning in calling on Mr. Gwinn; he took me to the composition-room, and gave me in charge of the foreman; a small, stout keg — once a depository of nails — was after a long search procured, and on that I took my stand at "the case." Jacket off, shirt sleeves rolled up, I began to learn the rudiments of the art of printing, and to begin the world in earnest. I had already picked up, while running about newspaper-offices, some slight knowledge of types, and the way in which they should be set in the compositor's "stick." This came to my assistance; but I first, and instantly, wished to be familiar with "the boxes" in the "cases," and, noticing that the boxes were of different sizes, I at once taught myself that the sizes were four in number, and each of a capacity suitable to the greater or less use of each letter; thus, the largest box was for the "lower-case" *e*; the *a*, *c*, *d*, *h*, *m*, *n*, *o*, *r*, *s*, *t*, and *u*, were each

<sup>1</sup> The first newspaper-office I recollect being in was that of "Niles' Register," situate in Light Street, Baltimore. I went there with my father in the spring of 1835, who had an appointment to meet there General Duff Green. I was so deeply impressed with the general's personality that it has never faded in my memory. His very tall and slender figure, his dress that of a South-western frontier pioneer, and the long staff of a sapling tree which he bore, recalled to my imagery Scott's description of Edie Ochiltree, "the

gaberlunzie," in the "Antiquary," a novel which I had recently read. I do not recollect that General Green and I saw each other again till the morning of September 7, 1859, when we met — and I made myself known to him — on board the Cunard liner *America*, at Boston harbor, bound for England: I going for recreation, he on a mission of great national importance — to which we shall recur. Our ancient acquaintanceship on my father's account quickly became a confidential intimacy.

of like size ; the *b, f, g, v, w*, and *y*, of lesser, but each alike ; and the *i, j, k, q*, and *x*, the smallest boxes, and likewise uniform. The punctuation marks were also in these smallest boxes ; and the capital letters were in "the upper case," in boxes of the same smallest capacity. Thus informed by my own observation, I was before the close of that Monday master of the types ; and on Tuesday morning I began to "set up" some "pi," that is, types which have fallen into mingled confusion ; and then, on following days, I "distributed" those types, that is, dropped them into their appropriate boxes in the cases. Before the end of the week I was "setting up matter" from the clippings from the "exchanges," and I saw my work appearing in the columns of the "Gazette." I have, since then, often read of the feeling of pride which young authors have in seeing their first efforts in print ; yet I doubt if any ever felt a truer and finer delight than I did when I saw my own mechanical labors in the columns of our newspaper. I was not conscious that I was doing anything worthy of attention till a month or more after this beginning, when casual visitors at the office were shown in to see me at work. I was then setting up from manuscript-copy, and this required me often to do the punctuation : and if punctuation correctly is to be done, it requires that the compositor knows what the author means. Writers, even the best, also occasionally write for the newspaper-press, who are proverbially without the ability to properly punctuate. I think it an injurious kindness to place a boy's merits on such exhibition, especially if he is doing well. It elates him unduly — at least, that was an effect on me.

The first week ended memorably for me ; for on Saturday evening, as I was leaving the office, I was recalled by the cashier, who handed to me three of the brightest half-dollars I have ever beheld. I have seldom been more

embarrassed. I knew how great the favor that I was there at all ; and I asked permission to decline taking the money. Mr. Gwinn had gone home, I was told. I was again and again assured that my work was useful, and that the money was not a gratuity. I believe this was as proud an occasion for me as any in my life ; and I have had occasions when I should be pardoned for feeling the glow of pride. I went quickly and directly home ; gave my mother the three half-dollars : and to my astonished, and by no means pleased parents, revealed that I had not been that week at school, but was “ a printer’s devil.” They were not readily reconciled, particularly my father, who had ambitious notions for my future. I think he had a hope that in the fullness of time I might receive an appointment for a cadetship at West Point : and, also, Hon. John L. O’Sullivan and his friend Commodore <sup>1</sup> Matthew C. Perry were regarding me as a probable candidate for the Navy School at Annapolis. That Saturday was, nevertheless, for me a gala night : I had my first sight of the interior of a circus. The company was Cook’s famous English troupe ; and the pantomime on the stage — in the Front Street Theatre — was Cinderella : an establishment, with its magnificent array of horses, soon afterwards destroyed there by fire. I was present at the conflagration, and the sight gave me a long headache.

What might have resulted from my father’s unwillingness was never to occur, as inexorable circumstances early settled the question for us all : the next Saturday all were paid their wages in paper money. The banks had at length suspended specie payment, and the currency known as “ shin-plasters ” was afloat upon the country.

<sup>1</sup> Then commander. After the death of my father I found among his papers letters written between these gentlemen on this subject. That of O’Sullivan’s I still have.



I was soon, with the world all before me, to make my way; and, from the first, with a care of others, — a care burthensome at times, still ever a ballast that kept me often steady and in a safe course. During this historical panic and crises, retrenchment of course was imperative in all things, and then there came the unexpected need that we all should be profitably employed, and that my father should again seek new employment elsewhere; and so he left Baltimore late in the spring of 1838 and went to Philadelphia, where we joined him that autumn; but he, meeting with only further discouragement, proceeded to New York in the summer of 1839, where he renewed his old friendship with Horace Greeley, who was now editing and publishing the “Politician’s Register” and the “Weekly New Yorker.” The “Log Cabin” was to come into existence the next year (1840), and the year following the “Tribune” to be “founded by Horace Greeley,” and to begin its grand course the year succeeding.<sup>1</sup> In Mr. Greeley’s service he continued till his death, August 15, 1845.

While I was at the “Baltimore Gazette,” the old Franklin and Adams press<sup>2</sup> was still used. The days for the wonderful Hoe’s press was not to be for years to come. The “dabber” was still sometimes used to ink the form of type; but soon the mechanical roller, and then with it the mechanical distributor of the ink, came. These were worked on alternate days by the other two apprentices and myself; we on one side of the press and the pressman opposite, with his left shoulder towards the

<sup>1</sup> See page .

<sup>2</sup> The first number was published in April, 1841. I was present that early Saturday morning in the basement of 29 Ann Street, New York, when O’Rourke, the pressman, turned the first copy of the *Tribune*

from the press. I was during this period doing some work — setting music, then printed from movable type — for Mr. Winchester, whose printing office was in the same building.

tympan. Limited as the number of subscribers were, about two hundred and fifty as I recollect, it was all of two hours before the papers could be struck off, folded, and we boys prepared to deliver them. This was the custom in serving subscribers, and looked on as no menial labor. We frequently entered at our own will into the residences, and on cold days were warmed by coffee and buns, and at the Christmas season gorged to the uttermost with niceties of domestic cookery. The present organized facilities, indeed the need of them, for printing, folding, and service of newspapers were not even conceived.

The chief exciting incident of the afternoon was the arrival of the "Express;" which brought the latest news into town by ponies with saddle-bags, and ridden by post-boys. These boys were wonders of, and envied by, the town-boys. The horns were sounded as the ponies came on at fullest speed, on reaching the main or Baltimore Street, and as the little animals always were foaming at flank and mouth — a device to indicate a length of road and fierce speed — it was a popular belief among the lads of the town that the ride was unbroken from city to city. The news was generally meagre, and a few lines sufficed, and appeared in the newspapers under a wood-cut representing the pony at highest speed, saddle bags, and the postboy; he blowing a horn from which the legend issued, "By Latest Express."

I was at the "Gazette" office a year and more when — my father then gone to Philadelphia — I was persuaded by the Hon. Z. Collins Lee, an old friend of our family, to turn my back on printing, and enter what he called "a great opening" in a wholesale dry goods establishment, and become a wealthy merchant. He told me that I was "a born salesman," and that my "manners were persuasive." I read the Life of William Roscoe, the Liverpool merchant, and the biographer of Lorenzo the Mag-

nificent and of Leo X., and I dilated with an appropriate emotion. I do not recollect who brought the work to my attention : perhaps Mr. Lee, who was a literary *gourmet*. The time of my probation was not sufficient to bring any such imputed ability into an approved perfection ; for at the end of the month I was told that I was “too d—n genteel” for my place ; that I did little but read books and “wash my hands.” It “was just like me,”<sup>1</sup> for it was true I always had a book in hand during any cessation, however short, of actual business : and that I washed my hands too often in my new occupation was perhaps true. The latter infirmity was a sad habit acquired from the printer’s art, where after handling type the hands are always soiled ; and the proneness to reading was ever a disposition as prevalent with me as if it arose from an original sin. So I and the uncongenialities of shop-keeping “in detail and in gross” parted, suddenly and determinately, never to meet again. I wished to be back again in the compositors’ room, but I was too proud to ask to be taken back into the “Gazette” office. As my father was in Philadelphia, I looked to resume such labors there ; and I soon bade adieu to “the Monumental City.”

There are two, I hope noteworthy, instances, of that period which I desire to record. One is of the Literary Club, which met in the hall of the Medical College in Holiday Street, next door to the theatre. The club had among its members the best and most learned and brilliant citizens of the town. I recollect of them the Hon.

<sup>1</sup> When Horace Greeley was going by the diligence over the Brunnig Pass in Switzerland, dinner was, as customary, taken at the hotel at Sarum. He discovered, when they were again *en route*, that he had paid three sous more than the others ;

and expressed a curiosity to learn why. “Perhaps you washed your face and hands after dinner. Three sous is the charge,” suggested a fellow tourist. “Well !” said Greeley, “that *would be* just like me.”

John P. Kennedy, author of "Horse-Shoe Robinson;" Hon. Z. Collins Lee, Hon. William M. Meredith, and Edgar Allan Poe. They were habitual attendants. There was, also, a person afterwards well known in New York, named Michael Walsh; he had native abilities but little education or instruction, and was a naturally gifted speaker. He was after his removal to New York — probably was at the time I speak of — a remarkably good lithographer, and he was later famous as "Mike Walsh," and as the editor of a local political journal called "The Subterraneum." His end was in accord with the irregularities and excesses of his life. The interest, however, which drew me to the Medical College was, that over a high brick wall which divided its yard from a side of the college, the stage of the theatre could be seen, and there were opportunities in warm weather to look in upon the stage through the wings and see the performances; and thus, unobserved, I first saw the play of "Richard the Third," — John R. Scott played the title part; the famous Ravels; and, in "the spectacular drama" of Gulliver in Lilliput, the dwarf "General" Stevens, Mary Gannon, and Porter, "the Kentucky Giant." That way I heard, also Miss Shereff, Wilson, and Brough sing the opera of "La Sonnambula."

About this time was the memorable inundation caused by the great freshet, which, breaking the dam at Jones' Falls, came down the stream that passes through the lower parts of the city, sweeping away entirely the stone bridges over Gay Street and two of the large buildings adjoining. The principal bridge at Baltimore Street was an almost impassable wreck. I was there early the following morning, and the stream was yet most turbulent, and bearing dead cattle, parts of farm buildings, fence rails, and the like, rapidly in its course. Baltimore in its finest parts is situate on a high plateau, and on one side rapidly slopes down to the streets near to the banks of the Jones'

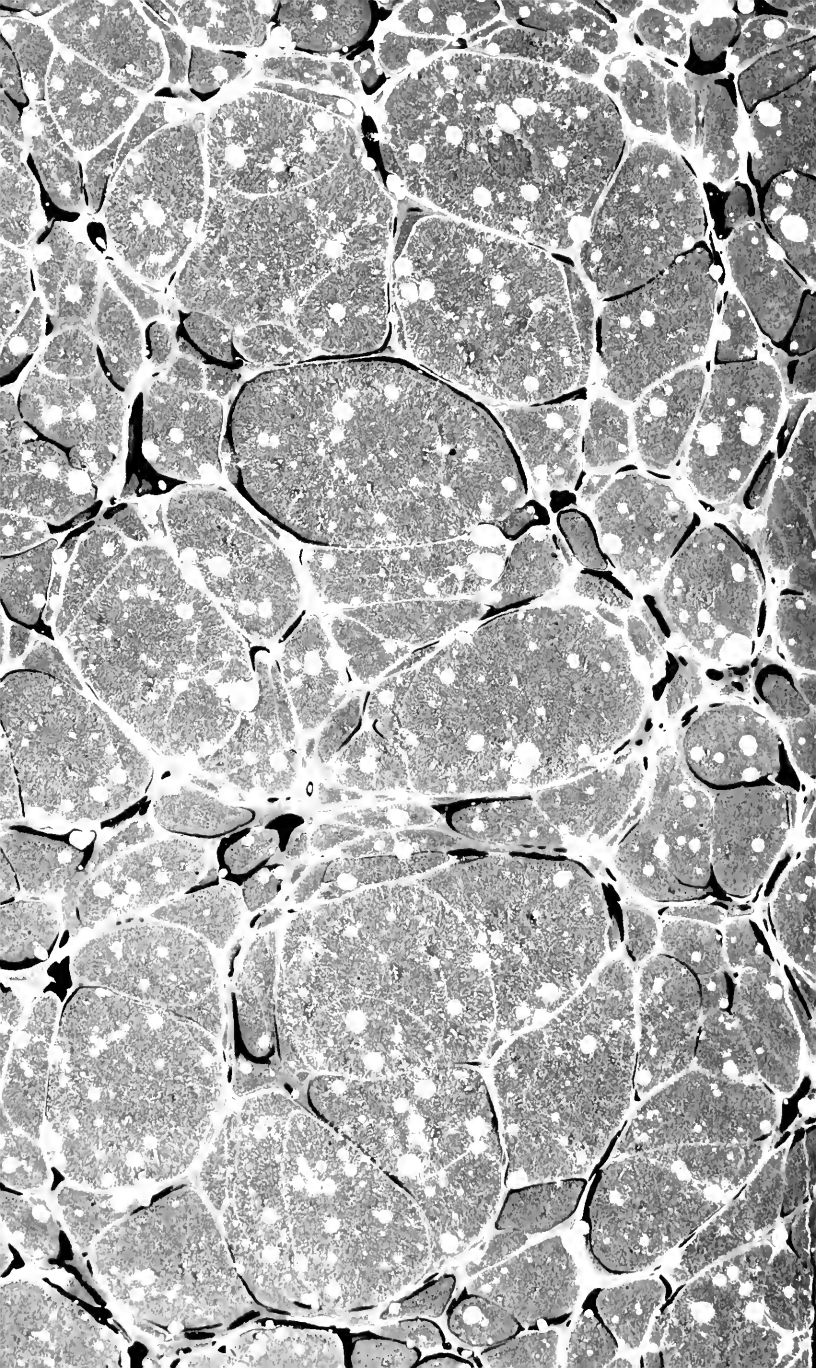
Falls stream. In this lower district all the damage was done. Many who slept on first floors of residences were drowned, and one of the pitifulest sights I saw were the bodies of the Lutheran German pastor, and of his wife and child, lying on the bed where death came to them.

Among the notabilities who came occasionally to Baltimore was Joseph Bonaparte, the elder brother of Napoleon I., and the former king of Spain. In October, 1859, I saw in Paris, as he was coming out the main entrance to the court of the Palais Royal, Jerome Bonaparte, the ancient king of Westphalia. He married and was the rightful husband of Elizabeth Paterson, of Baltimore : her successor was one of the movables arranged in compliance with dynastic policies. Her father was an Irishman, and a prosperous merchant and banker of Baltimore. I suppose that the ex-king saw that my companions and myself were Americans ; for he delayed a moment and lifted his hat with a sort of ceremony probably meant to be more emphatic than usual. Thus I have seen the eldest and the youngest brother of the first emperor. How near our own times are to those great events and to the prominent figures who seem as if to lie in the far, deep historic distance.

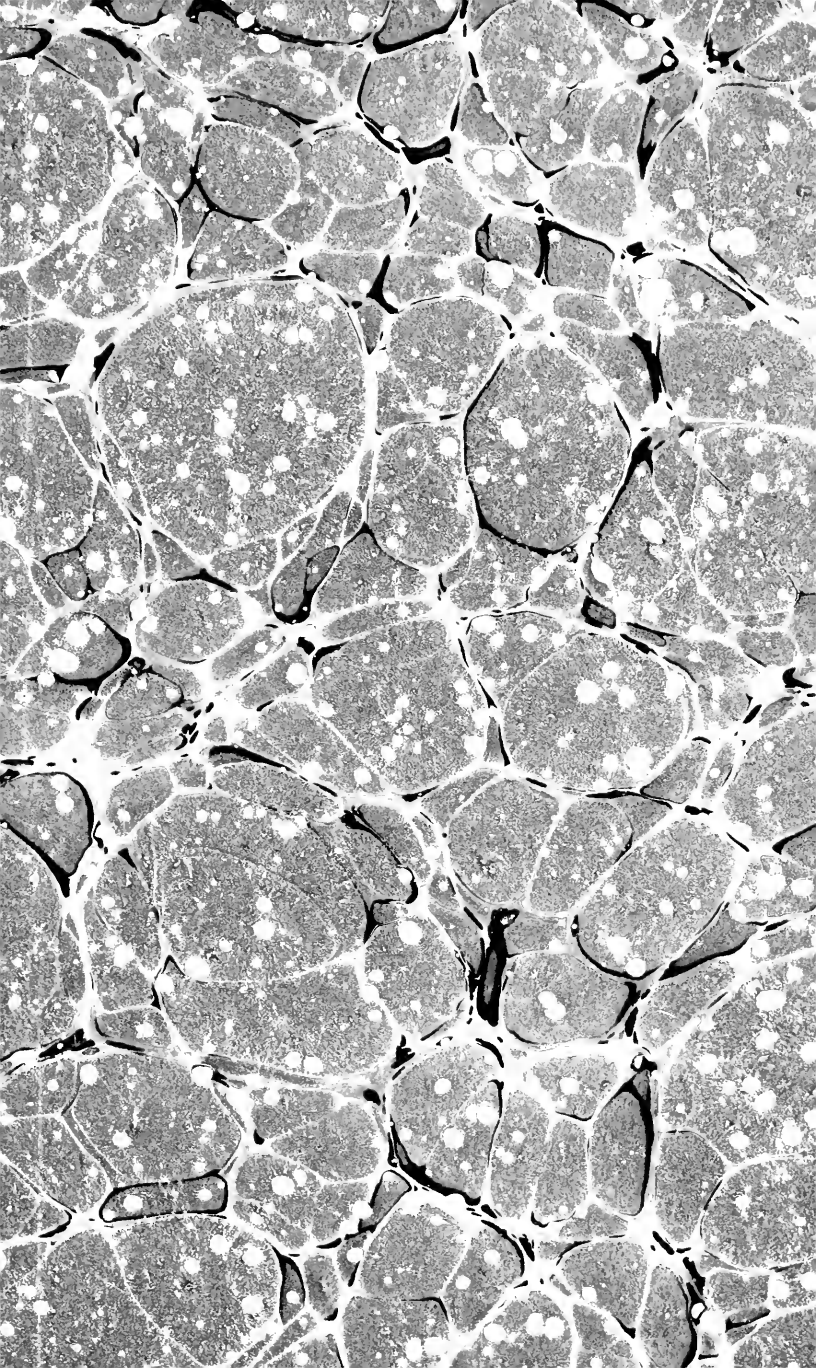
With this opening chapter I proceed to relate that which I myself recollect, and that which I have learned from others about my family and about myself. I cannot be absolutely certain as to the accuracy of what I have been told about my ancestral or collateral kinsfolk ; but I should be sure, from the trustworthy nature of my information, that that which I am to relate is nearer the truth than such traditions often are.











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